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THESIS

ABACUS OF FROZEN CONFLICTS

by

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June 2010

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ABACUS OF FROZEN CONFLICTS

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ABSTRACT

One of the central topics of international relations study is the function of military threats as a mean to deter international crises and war. Rational choice models provide the groundwork for theorizing circumstances under which conventional deterrence is likely to thrive or fail. According to Paul Huth, rational deterrence theorists have focused on four sets of variables: the balance of military forces, costly signaling and bargaining behavior, reputations, and interests at stake.[1] By using the case of the Russian-Georgian War of August of 2008, one can argue that an actor's perception, in addition to signaling, is another essential variable for successful deterrence.

---

[1] Paul K. Huth, "Deterrence and International Conflict: Empirical Findings and Theoretical Debates," *Annual Review Political Science, Vol. 2* (1999) 25.

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I.   INTRODUCTION

Always remember, however sure you are that you can easily win, that there would not be a war if the other man did not think he also had a chance.

Winston Churchill[2]

The concepts of asymmetric warfare are hardly new or revolutionary; recall the battle of David and Goliath. History is full of many examples of the weak fighting the strong. The likelihood of victory or defeat in asymmetric conflicts depends upon the strategies that the weak and strong actors use.[3] Within this framework of asymmetric warfare there exists an interesting puzzle that warrants attention: why do weaker states occasionally initiate an attack on stronger rivals? Throughout most of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the dominant powers engaged in sustained arms races to either maintain a balance of peace or establish a tactical asymmetry vis-à-vis their opponents as a guarantee of military victory in war. Conventional deterrence theory argues that the military supremacy of a relatively stronger power, coupled with a credible retaliatory threat, will convince another party to abstain from initiating some course of action and will prevent attacks by challengers. In such cases, the threat of retaliation serves as a deterrent, because it convinces the target not to carry out an intended action due to the costs and losses the target would incur. This is a "peace through strength" belief. Is such belief is a myth, given that asymmetric wars in which the weaker side attacked its stronger opponent abound? History illustrates several prominent cases including Pyrrus' attack on Italy in 275 BC, the Gallic, Gothic, and Heruli invasions of the Roman Empire in the third century AD, and the Muslim conquest of Persia in 636 AD.[4] In the modern era, weaker states have initiated numerous wars against their more powerful adversaries. The Chinese intervention in Korea in 1950, the Israeli attack on the Arab states in 1967,

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[2] Winston Churchill, *My early life, 1874–1904,* (Simon & Schuster Adult Publishing Group, New York, 1996), 232.

[3] Arreguin-Toft, Ivan. "How the Weak Win Wars: A Theory of Asymmetric Conflict." *International Security* 26, no. 1 (Summer 2001): 93–128.

[4] For brief descriptions of these wars, see John Laffin, *Brassey's Battles: 3,500 Years of Conflict, Campaigns and Wars from A–Z,* (London: Brassey's Defence, 1985).

the Egyptian offensive against Israel in Sinai in 1973, the Cambodian military incursions against Vietnam in 1977, the Somali attack on Ethiopia in 1977, and the Argentine invasion of the Falklands in 1982—all stand out as important cases in which a relatively weak state launched a war against a state with more power.

This thesis will reference the Russian-Georgian War of August of 2008 as a case study and isolate the factors that contributed to the initiation of the war, even though "there was no ongoing armed attack by Russia before the start of the Georgian operation."[5] With the attack on Tskhinvali Georgia put itself into position where such behavior would be discouraged by a high probability that Russia, as a peacekeeper in the region, would deny the benefits Georgia seeks and would project costs Georgia will find intolerable.

Such a deterrence policy works when one side convinces the other that it is both *willing* and *capable* to inflict unacceptable harm. These two components, willingness and capability, are essential for successful deterrence; without either one, it will fail. Note, however, that neither has to be real. It is only necessary for the other side to believe it is so. Conversely, it may happen that one side is both willing and capable to harm the other, but the other initiates hostilities anyway. For example, the Korean War began in this way.[6] The U.S. did not make clear enough its intention to fight in the case of an invasion of South Korea, and in the mistaken belief that the U.S. would not fight, the North invaded. This started a war that cost many lives and accomplished virtually nothing.

The research into the causes of August War of 2008 will demonstrate that deterrence also vitally depends on the potential aggressor's perception of the situation (not so much on the reality of it). The research concept itself is fairly simple, but its implementation is complex. It will address the origins and mechanics of the pre-August War of 2008 security dilemma that contributed to the escalation of the crisis and resulted in a conventional war initiated by a weaker opponent.

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[5] "Report of the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Conflict in Georgia," IIFFMCG (September 2009), Vol. 1, 23.

[6] Terence Roehrig, *From Deterrence to Engagement: The U.S. Defense Commitment to South Korea* (Lanham, Md: Lexington Books, 2006).

A.   THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

In his influential book *On War,* the foremost western military theorist of nineteenth century Prussia, Carl von Clausewitz, wrote, "War is nothing but the continuation of policy with other means." Additionally, when discussing the relationship between war and politics, he said, "The political object is the goal, war is the means [of] reaching it, and [the] means can never be considered in isolation from their purpose."[7] In other words, war is not separate from politics and military objectives are tied to political aims. That being said, the role that passion, prestige, pride, revenge, etc., play in making the decision to go to war cannot be ruled out. Moreover, chance and probability also affect the decision-making process and subsequent conduct of war. This thesis will follow a chain of pre-August War events to identify where key decision makers' perceptions of achieving limited objectives in a short war may have motivated the initiation of the August War of 2008. Game Theory is used in this research to attempt to mathematically capture the actor's perceptions, behavior patterns, and strategy solutions in a crisis situation.

This research has two main sections. The first explains how and why armed conflict arose after the fall of the Soviet Union, specifically within Georgia. Observers can easily misconstrue the origins of a security dilemma conflict such as this, for security dilemmas can emerge from a multitude of intentions and motivations, which can include defensive insecurity, offensive insecurity, and even offensive ambition. The origins of a security dilemma conflict have to be empirically investigated, not assumed. This, however, is an uncertain enterprise, thanks not only to the difficulties of gathering and assessing evidence, but also to the more abstract challenge of how to define motivations and distinguish among multiple ones. As this section discusses, this is particularly true in analyses of ethno-territorial conflict.

The second section investigates the mechanics of pre-August War of 2008 security dilemma to provide an outline of the relevant theoretical abstract related to the conflict initiation by the weaker power. While different combinations of intentions

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[7] Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, in Howard, M. and Paret, P. (eds. and trans.), (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), 86.

(defensive or offensive) and motivations (insecurity or ambition) are plausible, in reality it was Georgia's limited offensive intentions that triggered the conflict. Georgia was not a purely defensive security-seeker; neither did it launch a reckless war against Russia. It was seeking *relatively* nonviolent regime change in South Ossetia and, by extension, a resolution of the longstanding conflict. The escalation that resulted from this effort to change the status quo was both undesired and unexpected, but it was propelled by the security dilemma.

II.   HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

A.   SOVIET LEGACY

The dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 was one of the most unusual events in world history, as it was probably the only case of a superpower and its empire collapsing in peacetime. The Soviet Union was the last great world empire; it crossed eleven time zones, stretched from Europe to Asia and from the Arctic Ocean to the Pacific Ocean. Within these borders lived 120 different ethnic groups divided into 15 republics and various autonomous regions (Figure 1). Joseph Stalin, through brute force and the slaughter of national elites, welded together different ethnic groups, based on the idea that nationalism would disappear under communism and a Soviet people would emerge. This proved to be fundamentally false. Within this multicultural society, individual republic's demands for independence were always causing chaos in the USSR. With large populations and entire races living outside their homelands, ethnic conflicts in the USSR only needed a spark to ignite.

The fall of the Soviet Union in 1991 occurred following a wave of nationalist and democratic movements. The breaking of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the fall of the communist regime of the German Democratic Republic (GDR), as well as those of Hungary, Poland, Bulgaria, and Romania, among others, were a prelude to the end of regimes in the "communist world." The regimes came down as dominos, and the implosion of the USSR led to the creation of a new world order. The demise of one empire gave the birth to 15 independent countries.
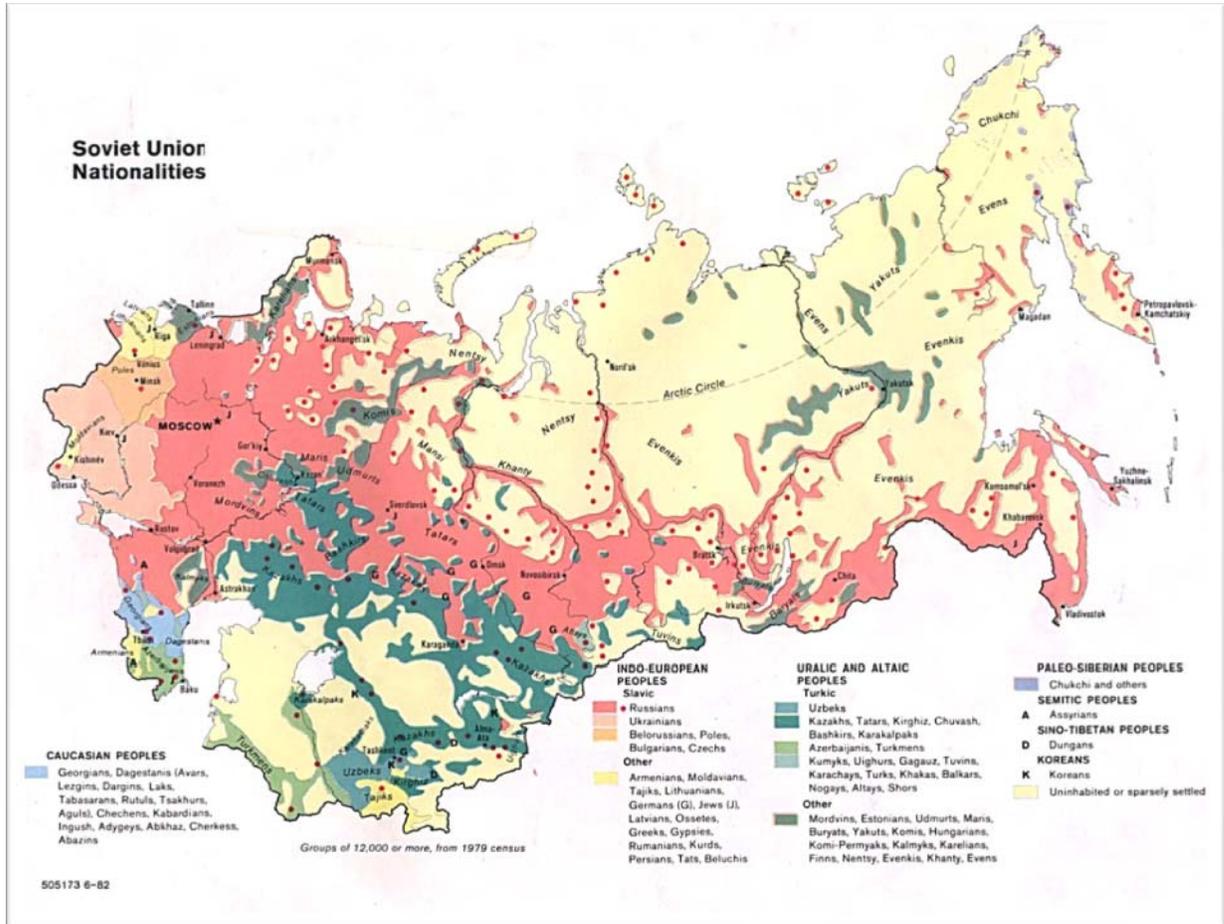
Figure 1.   USSR Nationalities, 1982[8]

B.   REPUBLIC OF GEORGIA

Over the centuries, the Caucasus region was the object of rivalry between Persia, Turkey, and Russia. The nations' history illustrates a constant struggle for survival, interspersed with brief interludes of peace. In the past, despite brief periods of independence, Georgia's various provinces were vassal states of Persia, Byzantium and the Arab Caliphs successively. Georgia was eventually annexed by Russia in the nineteenth century. Georgia emerged in the 1990s with overlapping legacies of Soviet totalitarianism and violent conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

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[8] Perry-Castañeda Library Map Collection, The University of Texas at Austin, http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/commonwealth/ussr_nat_82.jpg.

Figure 2.   Map of Georgia, 2008[9]

At the heart of the Georgian-Abkhaz and Georgian-Ossetian conflicts is the clash between the Abkhaz and Ossetians' claims for self-determination and Georgia's claim for territorial integrity. Historically, Georgia has had within its borders a number of regionally-tied ethnic minority groups, including Azerbaijanis, Armenians, Avars, Greeks, Ossetians, Russians and Abkhazians.[10] In 1989, ethnic Georgians made up 70.1 percent of the population of the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR).[11] According to Christoph Zurcher, the "mechanism of Soviet ethno-federalism" is responsible for the ethnically-based conflicts that broke out in the former Soviet space.[12] Zurcher argues that although the Azerbaijani and Armenian minority populations in Georgia were substantially bigger than the Abkhaz and Ossetian groups, the former two did not seek independence from Tbilisi's control because the Soviet federal system had drawn regional autonomy and the identity and symbolism that came with it was only for the Abkhaz and Ossetians, not for the other minorities in Georgia.[13] This argument, however, ignores the broader historical picture. The Soviet ethno-federal system, for the most part,

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[9] Country Profile: Georgia. http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/country_profiles/1102477.stm.

[10] Stephen F. Jones, "Georgia: A Failed Democratic Transition," in Ian Bremmer and Ray Taras (eds.), *Nations and Politics in the Soviet Successor States* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 293.

[11] Jones (1993), 289.

[12] Christoph Zurcher, "Georgia's Time of Troubles, 1989–1993," in Bruno Coppieters and Robert Legvold (eds.), *Statehood and Security: Georgia After the Rose Revolution*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press 2005), 98–101.

[13] Zurcher (2005), 98.

reflected the ethnic realities of the region in place centuries before the USSR. Furthermore, the Azerbaijanis and Armenians in Georgia could be seen as "spill-over" populations from their respective neighboring sovereign homelands. Many returned to Azerbaijan and Armenia during the periods of "trouble" in Georgia. Other large minority groups, such as the Avars in north-eastern Georgia were "traded," under an agreement with Daghestan, for Georgians living in that Russian autonomous region.[14] The Abkhaz and Ossetians, however, had no such option of "return." Their historical geographic homeland was entirely within Georgia.

1. South Ossetian Conflict

The collapse of the USSR was marked by ethnic-based violence, especially in the South Caucasus. Tensions in South Caucasus date back at least to the 1920s, when South Ossetia made abortive attempts to declare its independence, but ended up as an autonomous region within Soviet Georgia after the Red Army conquered Georgia.[15] Once Georgia came under Soviet rule in 1923, and for the remainder of Soviet rule, there was peace between the two groups. In December 1990, as the Soviet Union disintegrated, the Georgian-Ossetian conflict also turned violent and fighting lasted in South Ossetia until June 1992. As a result, thousands people died, hundreds more went missing, and tens of thousands on both sides were displaced internally, as well as to Russia's North Ossetia.[16] As Tbilisi lost control over the region, inter-ethnic relations were severely damaged, and so was Georgia's emerging statehood. In June 1992, Georgia and Russia signed the "Principles of the Settlement of the Georgian-Ossetian Conflict," known as the Sochi Agreement. This formalized a ceasefire, to be safeguarded by Joint Peacekeeping Forces (JPKF). The Georgian, Ossetian, and Russian sides each contributed a peacekeeping battalion under Russian command. The units totaled around 1,100 troops, comprised of about 530 Russians, a 300-member North Ossetian brigade (which was

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[14] Jones (1993), 296.

[15] Jim Nichol, "Russia-Georgia Conflict in South Ossetia: Context and Implications for U.S. Interests" CRS RL34618, http://fpc.state.gov/documents/organization/112446.pdf.

[16] Nick Meo, "Georgia: Roots of the South Ossetia Conflict," *Telegraph,* August 9, 2008 http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/georgia/2531024/Georgia-Roots-of-the-South-Ossetia-conflict.html.

actually composed of South Ossetians and headed by a North Ossetian), and about 300 Georgians. Monitors from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) did most of the patrolling.[17] The Sochi Agreement also established a Joint Control Commission (JCC) that would work with the JPKF to supervise the observance of the agreement and promote conflict settlement measures, including those that would further demilitarize, reconstruct, rehabilitate, and launch the dialogue and the return of IDPs and refugees.

2.   Abkhaz Conflict

Following the Georgian-Ossetian conflict, large-scale violence in the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict erupted in August 1992 and lasted more than 13 months. According to Red Cross, the conflict claimed between 10,000 and 15,000 lives and left over 8000 wounded.[18] About 250,000 were displaced from their homes.[19] Both Abkhazia and South Ossetia suffered from the massive destruction of infrastructure and homes. On 27 July 1993, an agreement was concluded between the Government of Georgia and the Abkhaz authorities, which re-established a ceasefire as of 28 July, 1993 (first ceasefire to take effect as of 5 September 1992, but fighting resumed on 1 October 1992).

In August of 1993, a UN Special Envoy established a UN Observation Mission (UNOMIG) to monitor the ceasefire. Its mandate was revised following the signing, on 14 May 1994, of the Moscow Agreement, which established a cease-fire and separation of forces. The Moscow Agreement also provided for a Commonwealth of Independent States Peacekeeping Force (CIS PKF) manned, in fact, *exclusively* by Russian forces. In accordance with this Agreement, a Security Zone (SZ) of roughly 12 kilometers was created on either side of the cease-fire line. In this Zone military units were forbidden; only personal weapons, including Rocket Propelled Grenade launchers (RPGs), could be

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[17] Jim Nichol, "Russia-Georgia Conflict in South Ossetia: Context and Implications for U.S. Interests" CRS RL34618.

[18] "Country Report Georgia/Abkhazia: ICRC Worldwide Consultation on the Rules of War." *International Committee of the Red Cross* (ICRC), Geneva, (November 1999).

[19] Oksana,Antonenko, "Frozen Uncertainty: Russia and the Conflict over Abkhazia, " in Bruno Coppieters and Robert Legvold (eds.), *Statehood and Security: Georgia After the Rose Revolution*, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005), 205

carried. On either side of the Security Zone was the broader Restricted Weapons Zone, in which tanks, armored transport vehicles, and artillery and mortars equal to or greater than 81 millimeters were prohibited.[20] UNOMIG operated independently from the CIS PKF but kept in close contact with them.

In 1997, the UN Special Envoy's position was upgraded to that of Special Representative of the Secretary-General and assumed a more constant role facilitating negotiations. The UN-led negotiations later became known as the Geneva Process. During the 1990s, the political and security situations in both conflicts settled into a relatively benign, or "frozen," status.

3.   Frozen Peace Processes

Neither the Georgian-Ossetian nor Georgian-Abkhaz peace processes made progress on the issue of political status. Several proposals for interim agreements or common state solutions stalled. According to observers, the respective parties did not perceive possibilities of political solutions that would meet their interests, and this influenced the degree of consistency and commitment they made to the peace processes. In the Ossetian case, formal negotiations in the second half of the 1990s made some progress on issues of return, demilitarization, and reconstruction. Informal channels, including vigorous trade and commerce in the large Ergneti market on the administrative border of South Ossetia, helped build confidence between the societies and improve inter-ethnic relations.[21] However, the mutually exclusive political claims of both sides continued to undermine the prospects of resolution.

C.   DETERIORATING SECURITY

The frozen conflict dynamic changed dramatically after Mikheil Saakashvili came to power. Following his 2004 election, Saakashvili and his government moved swiftly and effectively to improve governance in Georgia, reduce corruption, push through economic reforms, and welcome foreign investment. The Georgian economy started to

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[20] "UNOMIG's Role," United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia.

[21] Célia Chauffour and Tarel Gussep, "Activity Resumes in Ergneti," *Caucaz.com*, (January 5, 2005).

grow rapidly. At the same time, Saakashvili made clear his intention that Georgia follow the path of other successful post-communist democracies to draw closer to, and eventually join, NATO and the European Union. He viewed the restoration of territorial integrity as a requirement of re-building Georgia's statehood. Staunchly pro-Western foreign policy choices were meant to support this process and Georgia's democratization. These policies irritated Moscow.[22] In response, Russia meddled and increased its support to Abkhazia and South Ossetia. As tensions mounted, the Georgian leadership opted for conflict resolution policies dominated by the threat of the use of force and isolation, which served to further alienate Abkhaz and Ossetian constituencies. In South Ossetia, a 2004 anti-smuggling operation by Saakashvili's government closed down the Ergneti market.

In a short memo from 2008, U.S. Department of State, Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs summarized:

> The cessation of hostilities brought on by the Sochi Agreement held fast into 2004. At that point, Georgian President Eduard Shevardnadze had been replaced by Mikheil Saakashvili, who expressed a renewed interest in reintegrating Georgia's separatist regions. In keeping with this policy, the Georgian Government placed a special emphasis on the regulation and monitoring of trade within and through South Ossetia, closing down a particularly large South Ossetian market which had been used for unregulated trade. South Ossetian forces retaliated by closing highways and detaining Georgian troops within South Ossetian borders. Tensions between the sides escalated, and exchanges of mortar fire in late July and August 2004 killed dozens.[23]

These forceful measures led to a deterioration of security. Hostilities resumed in July and August 2004; dozens were killed, and a full-scale war was narrowly avoided when both sides declared a ceasefire in August. Even though the ceasefire held until the summer of 2008, the situation remained volatile, with nightly exchanges of fire, kidnappings, reciprocal detentions, and occasional killings. The Georgian move and the

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[22] Dmitri Trenin, "Russia's Foreign and Security policy Under Putin," Carnegie Moscow Center, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 24.06.2005 from http://www.carnegie.ru/en/pubs/media/72804.htm.

[23] "The United States and the South Ossetian Conflict." Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs, U.S. Department of State, Washington, DC (March 31, 2008).

August 2004 escalation also destroyed bridges that had been built across the conflict divide during the late 1990s. South Ossetians feared that Tbilisi wanted to physically obliterate them and pointed to the closure of Ergneti and the resumption of hostilities as a direct proof of this. South Ossetian leaders increasingly turned to Russia. Irritated by Tbilisi's NATO pursuits, Moscow stepped up its engagement in South Ossetia and Abkhazia.[24] The inter-state and intra-state layers of the Georgian-Ossetian, Georgian-Abkhaz and Georgian-Russian conflicts became ever more entangled.

Since 2004, with the majority of the Abkhazian and South Ossetian population claiming Russian citizenship, Moscow has cited concerns for the security of its citizens as a possible motive for escalating the conflicts. In July 2004 Russian authorities claimed that Moscow "will not remain indifferent towards the fate of its citizens, which compromise the absolute majority of South Ossetia."[25]

Tbilisi had come to view the negotiations and peacekeeping arrangements in both conflict areas as unjust. It had long been frustrated with Moscow's actions in Abkhazia and South Ossetia and asserted that Moscow could not be an honest broker in either peace process. Since 2005, Tbilisi has actively sought to change the *status quo*, especially in the Georgian-Ossetian peace process, because it was deemed easier to solve. Substantive dialogue in Joint Control Commission (JCC), established by the degree in 1992 by Sochi Agreement, faltered. Minimal cooperation also faltered; there was no longer any coordination of local security issues. Tbilisi tried to internationalize the conflict and secure a greater role for the EU in the process. But before this could happen, the JCC process itself froze, with both sides unable to produce as much as a joint press statement.

In addition to promoting changes in the negotiating and peacekeeping arrangements, the Georgian government also initiated changes on the ground in and

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[24] Dmitri Trenin, "Russia's Foreign and Security Policy Under Putin," Carnegie Moscow Center, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 24.06.2005 from http://www.carnegie.ru/en/pubs/media/72804.htm.

[25] Statement "В Связи с Обострением Ситуации Вокруг Южной Осетии" (Russian) 9 July 2004. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, www.ln.mid.ru/brp_4.nsf/sps/3C8799FB6DC16167C3256ECC0045352E.

around the conflict zones. In the November 2006 two separate presidential elections and two separate referenda on the future of the breakaway Georgian region of South Ossetia were held on. In one vote, Eduard Kokoiti, the de facto president of the self-declared Republic of South Ossetia since 2001, had been declared the winner with a sweeping 95 percent of the vote, based on preliminary results. In a so-called "alternative" poll organized on Georgian-controlled territory in South Ossetia, Dmitri Sanakoyev—a former prime minister of the de facto South Ossetian republic (who Tskhinvali officials claim is bankrolled by Tbilisi)—had been declared the president-elect, with more than 80 percent of the vote. Sanakoev, however, only operated in Georgian-controlled areas of the conflict zone and had no influence among the South Ossetian constituency. The Tbilisi government gave Sanakoev significant financial and political backing, and they incorporated his structure into the central government in May 2007. Tbilisi wanted to have Sanakoev as a negotiating partner with whom status negotiations on South Ossetia's future within Georgia would be possible.[26]

In strict territorial terms, Russian-Abkhazian or Russian-Ossetian control over the provinces was still not complete. Georgia controlled the mountainous Kodori valley inside Abkhazia—an area which could serve as a strategic outpost in the event of new conflict (Figure 3). A pro-Georgian administration also governed a substantial Georgian-populated enclave inside South Ossetia, on the main road between the regional capital Tskhinvali and the Russian border. This lack of consolidation made the separatist administrations tense.

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[26] Ellen Barry, "Georgia's Battered Face in a Separatist Republic," *The New York Times*, (October 31, 2008).

Figure 3.   Map of Georgia[27]

The result was that the two contested areas were part of a vague and unstable overall situation. The authorities in Abkhazia and South Ossetia were alarmed about the continued existence of Georgian enclaves that denied them the sense of being entirely in charge of their respective territories. But these very enclaves constituted points of vulnerability for the Georgian side as well. The government in Tbilisi feared that a military move against one or both of them could trigger a new war, which is what happened.

Keeping parts of Abkhazia and South Ossetia under the control of Georgia and Russia's formal recognition of the separatist regions as a part of Georgia helped create an illusion in Tbilisi (shared by much of the international community) that some progress in solving the conflicts could be reached within the foreseeable future.[28]

[27] Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), The World Factbook, https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/maps/maptemplate_gg.html.

[28] Ghia Nodia "The Russia-Georgia War: Mission Unaccomplished" Georgian Daily News, August 14, 2009, http://georgiandaily.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=14071&Itemid=132.

As late as Georgia's double-election (presidential and parliamentary) in January-May 2008, Mikheil Saakashvili's high-profile campaign rhetoric pledged to bring the conflicts over Abkhazia and South Ossetia to an end. On Saakashvili's initiative, an International Conference on Peaceful Settlement of Georgian-Ossetian Conflict unveiled new proposals calling the status quo unsustainable. He claimed Georgia would aggressively pursue peace as he was not prepared "to wait for the next 100 years to resolve these problems."[29] Such aggressive rhetoric proved to be an important miscalculation in Saakashvili's government, showing the role of emotions in international affairs. Later such tone of language becomes appropriate pretext for Russian provocation.

According to Georgian National Security Council Secretary, Alexander Lomaia, a proxy confrontation with Russian forces—similar to the first South Ossetian conflict in 1991–92, was the worst option. But Georgians believed that after the fiascos in Chechnya, Moscow would not further risk its international reputation by invading a sovereign country.[30] Looking a year back, it is clear that Tbilisi miscalculated Russia's retaliation strategy. Secretary of the National Security Council of Georgia since 2007 Lomaia stated, "We expected that the Russians would fight with the hands of the separatists."[31] Such optimism was allegedly caused by a misreading of Russian intentions and the perceived obsolescence of military power as a Russian policy instrument. Such miscalculations in strategic assessment quickly resulted in the inaccurate framing of the Georgian national security strategy as well as its defense and security strategies. While the *Military Doctrine* (2005) envisaged the likelihood of external aggression and major conventional war, other major doctrinal documents, namely the *National Security Concept* (2005), the *Strategic Defense Review* (2007), and the *Minister of Defense Vision* (2008) regarded it only as a remote possibility.[32] The existence of such clear conflict of the strategic and politico-military analysis consequently had an impact on the entire

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[29] BBC Monitoring (online version), July 9, 2005, *Imedi TV,* Tbilisi, 11:00GMT, 9July 2005, as quoted in Tracey German, *Abkhazia and South Ossetia: Collision of Georgian and Russian Interests* (June 2006), www.ifri.org/downloads/germananglais.pdf .

[30] Lomsadze, Giorgi, "Georgia: Flaws found in Tbilisi's War Planning and Operation," EurasiaNet, (September 15, 2008).

[31] Ibid.

[32]. Levan Tsutskiridze, "Key for the New Strategy," *Apsny*, (September 4, 2009).

system of military forces training, operational planning, and procurement. The lasting impact of the previous conflict in Abkhazia and South Ossetia led to an emphasis on low-intensity conflict and counterinsurgency-type operations.[33] In addition, political commitments had preoccupied the large part of the Georgian military personnel and material resources with peacekeeping contingency operations, mainly the deployment to Iraq. In Iraq, Georgia, a nation of 4.6 million people, had the third-largest presence in the coalition, after the United States and Britain.[34]

D.   RUSSIA'S ROLE

Bilateral ties between the two countries have been strained since Georgia's 1991 independence. Support to Abkhaz and Ossetians from a diverse group of actors from the chaotic Russia of the early 1990s and from North Caucasian volunteers to independent-minded members of the military "helped" Tbilisi lose both wars. The background of North Caucasian, or namely Chechen, hatred for Georgians (which reached its height in 1944 when Stalin used Georgian detachments of the NKVD in an effort to deport Chechens as a nation to Central Asia)[35] makes the decision by Russia to use Chechen forces in South Ossetia in 2008 as brutal as it was to let them fight with the Abkhaz against the Georgians in 1992. Although Russia assumed a peacekeeping role, its involvement in Abkhazia and South Ossetia undermined its impartiality and deeply distressed officials in Tbilisi. They were also distressed by Russia's overt pursuit of economic, military, and strategic interests in both of Georgia's breakaway territories. Relations deteriorated rapidly after Saakashvili came to power. The new president pressed to change the *status quo* in the conflict resolution processes and sought speedy integration into NATO and the EU. The period between 2004 and 2008 was marked by security and diplomatic missteps between Russia and Georgia. Moscow tried to pressure Georgia by imposing a trade embargo and closing land, air, and postal links. In some

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[33] Koba Liklikadze, "Lessons and Losses of Georgia's Five Days War with Russia," *Eurasia Daily Monitor* Vol. 5, Issue: 185, *The Jamestown Foundation*, (September 25, 2008).

[34] Koba Liklikadze, "Iraq: As Third-Largest Contingent, Georgia Hopes To Show Its Worth," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, (September 10, 2007).

[35] Umalt Chadayev , "The Deportation of 1944—How it Really Was," *Prague Watchdog* (February 25, 2008).

parts of the Russian capital, posters appeared telling Russians "to support the motherland" and not to touch Georgian produce. Antagonistic rhetoric accompanied repeated disruptions of diplomatic relations. Bitter personal relations between presidents Saakashvili and Putin made things worse. The unilateral deployment of additional Russian troops as peacekeepers, along with military equipment in Abkhazia in April and May 2008 caused unparalleled security concerns in Tbilisi. In the summer of 2006, Georgia arrested several Russian military intelligence officers who were accused of conducting bombings in Gori. Moscow responded by closing Russia's only road crossing with Georgia and rounding up people living in Russia (including school children) with ethnic Georgian names and deporting them.[36] Russian officials argued that this was a campaign against illegal migration and organized crime. However, the disproportionately high number of ethnic Georgians in a context of deep political hostility, backed up by many official statements, suggests Georgians were specifically targeted. Finally, in March of 2007 Russian attack helicopters launched an aerial assault, combined with artillery fire, on the Georgian Government's administrative offices in Abkhazia's Upper Kodori Valley. Later that year in August, Russian fighter jets violated Georgian airspace and unsuccessfully launched a missile at a Georgian radar station.[37] On April 20, 2008, Russian pressure took a more ominous turn when a Russian fighter jet shot down an unarmed Georgian unmanned aerial vehicle over Georgian airspace in Abkhazia. Russia also increased its military presence in Abkhazia without the required consultation with the Government of Georgia. In late April, Russia sent highly-trained airborne combat troops with howitzers to Abkhazia, ostensibly as part of its peacekeeping force. Later in May, Russia dispatched construction troops to Abkhazia to repair a railroad link to Russia.[38]

The turning politico-military point came in April 2008, when the NATO summit in Romania postponed granting the Membership Action Plan (MAP) to Georgia, limiting

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[36] Testimony of William J. Burns, Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs. Senate Foreign Relations Committee Hearing, (September 17, 2008).

[37] Ibid.

[38] Testimony of Daniel Fried, Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs. House Committee on Foreign Affairs, (September 9, 2008).

itself to political declarations in support of Georgian aspirations to join the Alliance in the foreseeable future. The event was interpreted as a setback in Tbilisi and a success in Moscow. Consequently, the military tensions in both conflict zones have increased and developed into the "drones' war" in Abkhazia. In this context, in mid-summer 2008, Russia moved a significant military force to its southern border under the cover of a military drill. This coincided with the NATO-PFP exercise in Georgia. Though the Georgian side overplayed this move diplomatically, later developments demonstrated it had failed to assess the real Russian agenda and take the appropriate precautionary measures.

Until this period of time, there had been more consistency regarding the status of breakaway regions. Russia may have provided economic support and security guarantees to places such as South Ossetia, but it did not recognize them as independent (unlike Turkey in relation to Northern Cyprus).Russian policymakers had, until then, argued that the principle of territorial integrity should be sacrosanct, thus justifying their action in Chechnya and condemning countries which have recognized Kosovo as independent. At the last press conference as head of state on February 14, 2008, President Vladimir Putin laid out several points in response to journalist questions. First, he confirmed, that the territorial integrity of the state is the most important principle of international law: "We think that to support a unilateral declaration of independence by Kosovo is amoral and against the law. Territorial integrity is one of the fundamental principles of international law…Why should we encourage separatism?"[39] Second, he announced the necessity of comprehensive approaches to resolving ethno-political conflicts. Third, he accented that Russian diplomacy would not copy the U.S. approach toward Kosovo. Putin stated that both Serbia and Cypress should be allowed territorial integrity. He said that Russia would not simply recognize the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia after the U.S. and Europe recognized Kosovo. However, again, as in the past, Moscow showed intentions of conducting reactive policy. Russian policy-makers had long declared there would be implications for comparable breakaway provinces in the former Soviet Union.

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[39] Transcript of Annual Big Press Conference of the President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin (February 14, 2008).

August of 2008 began with two bomb explosions in a Georgian-controlled territory in South Ossetia, injuring five Georgian policemen. On August 2, a firefight broke out in South Ossetia that killed six South Ossetians and one Georgian policeman. On August 3, Russia declared that South Ossetia was close to a "large-scale" military conflict, and the next day, South Ossetia evacuated hundreds of women and children to Russia. On August 5, Moscow issued a statement saying that it would defend Russian citizens in South Ossetia. It is important to note that these were mainly South Ossetians— that is to say, Georgian citizens—to whom Russia had simply handed Russian passports.[40] On August 6, both Georgia and South Ossetia accused each other of opening fire on villages in the region.

E.   THE WAR OF AUGUST OF 2008

Within a single week in August of 2008, two sequential wars began and ended. One was an intra-state war between Georgia and South Ossetia, which Georgia won quickly and decisively. The other was an international war between Russia and Georgia, which Georgia lost equally decisively (Figure 5). The August 2008 War broke out amid political hostility, volatile security, militarization, and a physical separation of conflicted communities.

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[40] "Georgia Offers Rebels Ceasefire," *BBC News*, (August 8, 2008). Committee on European Integration, Parliament of Georgia.

Figure 4.   Map of 2008 Georgia-Russian War[41]

Georgia's move into the South Ossetian capital provided Russia a pretext for a response that quickly grew far out of proportion to the actions taken by Georgia. Russia's response to Georgia's misguided military offensive against Tskhinvali clearly went far beyond the boundaries of South Ossetia that Moscow claimed it wanted to protect. The Russian military invaded deep into Georgia, destroying both military and civilian targets. Around the zones of conflict, Georgia lost control of territories it had previously controlled (Kodori Gorge in Abkhazia and the Didi Liakhvi, Patara Liakhvi, and Prone gorges in South Ossetia, as well as the Akhalgori district).[42] According to an Amnesty International report "Civilians in the aftermath of war: The Georgia-Russia conflict one

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[41] University of California, Davis, http://www.ucdavis.edu/spotlight/0908/large_map.html.

[42] "Georgia's Kodori Gorge Virtually Cut Off," *FOX News*, (August 12, 2008).

year on," more than 30,000 people, mostly ethnic Georgians, remain displaced in 2009,[43] At the peak of the fighting, some 192,000 people from both sides were displaced and hundreds were killed (casualty totals are disputed). The Georgia-Russia War of August of 2008 has also left a host of issues unresolved. These issues include the future of the contested territories of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, the resettlement of the expelled and displaced, the fate of Georgia's aspiration to join NATO, and the ambitions of an emboldened Russia. The bitter fallout from the vicious conflict means it will be some time before the long-term impact of the war in these and other areas will become clear.

This was the first time since the breakup of the Soviet Union that Moscow had sent its military across an international frontier in such circumstances, and this was Moscow's first attempt to change, by force, the borders that emerged from the breakup of the Soviet Union.

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[43] "Civilians in the Aftermath of War: The Georgia-Russia Conflict One Year On," Amnesty International, (August 2009), http://www.amnesty.org/library/asset/EUR04/001/2009/en/f9998486-b2d7-4356-843d-196a8a6c9486/eur040012009eng.pdf.

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III.   THEORIES

This chapter addresses the hypotheses regarding factors that contributed to the initiation of the August War of 2008. This conflict broke out amid political hostility, volatile security, militarization, and a physical separation of conflicted communities. This chapter also addresses the importance of perception in the Spiral Model, considers the possibility of unintended war, and brings to the attention the role of misperception in Deterrence Theory in an attempt to explain the outbreak of war.

A.   THE SPIRAL MODEL

The theoretical literature of interstate conflict is dominated by two conceptual models, classical Deterrence Theory and the Spiral Model. The Spiral Model and the Deterrence Theory are similar in kind and opposite in substance. The fundamental tenet of classical Deterrence Theory is that credible and capable threats can prevent the initiation, and contain the escalation, of conflict. By contrast, proponents of the Spiral Model claim that the prescriptions associated with Deterrence Theory frequently lead to vicious cycles of reciprocated conflict. Both models attempt to explain the outbreak of war. Both assign a central role to national misperception. Specifically, both posit the idea that states adopt war-causing policies in the false expectation that these policies will elicit compliance. However, they put forward the idea of opposite misperceptions.[44]

One should note that the Spiral Model may incorporate one misperception, namely that the punishing state falsely expects that punishment will elicit better behavior from the other, when it actually elicits worse behavior. The Deterrence Theory incorporates two misperceptions. First it assumes the appeasing state falsely expects that appeasement will elicit better behavior, when in fact it elicits worse behavior; and second, the appeased state then falsely expects the appeaser won't carry out its threats, when in fact it will.

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[44] These models are outlined in Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), Chapter 3 ("Deterrence, the Spiral Model, and Intentions of the Adversary,"), 58–113.

Typically invoked to explain unintentional wars, or the road to such wars, Jervis declares "when states seek the ability to defend themselves, they get too much and too little …too little because others, being menaced, will increase their own arms and so reduce the first state's security."[45] The latter focuses on the impact of an actor's actions: "what one does to enhance one's own security causes reactions that, in the end, can make one less secure."[46] In summary, the Spiral Model posits that security-seeking states are motivated by fear and mistrust and therefore assume the worst of their neighbors. States seek the ability to defend themselves by acquiring the means for insuring marginal security, thus threatening the security of other states.

According to Barry Posen, several of the causes of conflict and war highlighted by the security dilemma operate with considerable intensity among the groups emerging from empires. Newly independent states must first determine whether neighboring states are a threat. Unless proven otherwise, one group is likely to assume that another group's sense of identity, and the cohesion that it produces, is a danger. Proving it to be otherwise is likely to be very difficult. Because the cohesion of one's own group is an essential means of defense against the possible depredations of neighbors, efforts to reinforce cohesion are likely to be undertaken. Propagandists are put to work writing a politicized history of the group, and the mass media are directed to disseminate that history. The media may either willingly, or under compulsion, report unfolding events in terms that magnify the threat to the group. As neighboring groups observe this, they do the same. These other actors, being threatened, will act similarly for the sake of their own security, often resulting in an arms race, policies that weaken potential rivals, war, etc. "These symmetrical beliefs produce incompatible policies with results that are in neither side's interests."[47] Correspondingly, the cumulative effect may be that a war might occur "by accident" under such circumstances.

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[45] Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), 64.

[46] Posen, B. R., 1993. "The security dilemma and ethnic conflict," in M. E. BROWN, *Ethnic conflict and International security.* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press), 104.

[47] Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*, 65

B.   ACCIDENTAL WAR

In the large body of literature on the causes of war, there is a stark contrast in the ways in which political scientists and historians view the concept that a war might occur "by accident," produced by the unintentional dynamics of military organizations or systems, rather than by contrary political intentions. Indeed, among historians there appears to be a consensus that there has never been an "accidental war." Geoffrey Blainey's *The Causes of War*, for example, reaches the conclusion that "no wars are unintended or "accidental":

> The idea of "unintentional war" and "accidental war" seems misleading. The sudden vogue for these concepts in the nuclear age reflects not only a justifiable nervousness about war but also the backward state of knowledge about the causes of war.[48]

Blainey's position reflects a wide-spread opinion among contemporary military and diplomatic historians. Michael Howard states "however inchoate or disreputable the motives for war may be, its initiation is almost by definition a deliberate and carefully considered act … if history shows any record of "accidental" wars, I have yet to find them."[49] "I know of no war in modern times," Bernard Brodie wrote in the same way, "that one could truly call accidental in the sense that it came about despite both sides having a strong aversion to it, through not seeing where their diplomatic moves were taking them."[50] Evan Luard's review of the causes of wars from 1300 to 1985 correspondingly concludes:

> …throughout the whole period of history we have been surveying it is impossible to identify a single case in which it can be said that a war started accidently: in which it was not, at the time when war broke out, the deliberate intention of at least one party that war should take place.[51]

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[48] Geoffrey Blainey, *The Causes of War* (New York: The Free Press, 1973), 249, 144.

[49] Michael Howard, *The Causes of War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983).

[50] Bernard Brodie, "How Much is Enough? Guns versus Butter Revisited," California Seminar on Arms Control and Foreign Policy, Lecture Series No. 56, August 1975, originally cited in Marc Trachtenberg, "The Past and Future of Arms Control," Daedalus, vol.120. no.1, (Winter 1991), 208.

[51] Evan Luard, *War in International Society* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 232.

In short, war is conceived by the abovementioned scholars in pure Clausewitzian terms—as a rational instrument controlled and used by statesmen to achieve important political objectives.

C.   THE DETERRENCE THEORY

The Deterrence Theory posits that conflict arises from acts of appeasement made in the false expectation that appeasement will elicit better behavior from another state. In fact, appeasement often results in more demands from the other state. A revisionist state may believe that the status quo power is weak and challenges to test it. To avoid this, a status quo state must display the ability and willingness to wage war. As evidence against Deterrence, Jervis cites cases in which threats fail and lead to increased hostility. Moreover, he mentions cases where the conflict develops in a manner and scope that are far from the original conflict of interests (e.g., Anglo-German relations in the pre-WW I era).

Broadly defined, deterrence is the threat of force intended to convince a potential aggressor not to undertake a particular action, because the costs will be unacceptable or the probability of success extremely low. This threat has always been one of the central strategic principles by which nations attempted to prevent conflict.[52] Deterrence in the conventional sphere has been defined as a function of the capability of denying an aggressor its battlefield objectives with conventional forces.[53] Jervis argues that both Deterrence Theory and Spiral Model hypothesize that states adopt war-causing policies in the false expectation that these policies will elicit compliance from other states.

During the early 1960s, Glenn H. Snyder compared the two options available to potential attackers: "attack" and "do not attack" from a policy perspective. In the early 1990s, Barry Buzan also discussed the potential choices of "challenge" and "do not

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[52] See, for example, George Quester, *Deterrence Before Hiroshima*: *The Airpower Background of Modern Strategy* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Books, 1986); and Richard Ned Lebow, "Thucydides and Deterrence," *Security Studies*, 16 (April–June 2007), 163–188.

[53] John Mearsheimer, *Conventional Deterrence* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1983), 15.

challenge."[54] These analyses incorporate the actors' uncertainty regarding the possible strategies, that is to say, they take into account the possible influence on the challenger of the defender's possible actions. Both studies incorporate the rational choice perspective.

According to the rational choice framework, a potential challenger appraises the costs and benefits of the act of challenging itself, as well as taking into consideration the risk that the defender may make good its threat to resist the challenger. In other words, at least four variables affect the decision making of the actor being deterred – the costs and benefits, the probability of the defender's threat being true, and the probability of its being false. If the challenger decides not to take action after considering these factors, deterrence is considered successful; if the challenger takes action, deterrence has failed.

This concept could be applied to both deterrence by punishment (influence cost) and deterrence by denial (influence benefits). Regarding the former, states in adversarial interaction maintain adequate forces to sustain a credible retaliatory potential. The would-be initiator is deterred, because the threat of retaliation makes the benefits from the attack worth less than its costs. In deterrence by denial, adversaries maintain military forces for the purpose of denying battlefield success to their opponents. As war initiation does not guarantee one's objectives on the battlefield, the potential initiator is deterred from engaging in an attack.[55]

Denial type deterrence is most significant in the conventional sphere. For this study of the Russian-Georgian War of August of 2008, the most relevant form of deterrence is deterrence by denial. Georgia, with the initiation of war, put itself into position with a high probability that Russia, as a peacekeeper in the region, would deny the benefits Georgia seeks by restraining battlefield success.

Deterrence logic is based on the idea that the attacker will be more likely to fight (deterrence failing) if the attacker's overall existing and potential military and economic

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[54] See Glenn H. Snyder, *Deterrence and Defense* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), 16–27; Barry Buzan, *An Introduction to Strategic Study: Military Technology and International Relations* (London: Macmillan Academic and Professional Ltd, 1991), 166.

[55] Glenn H. Snyder, *Deterrence and Defense: Toward a Theory of National Security* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), 14–15.

capabilities exceed those of the defender.[56] To build the argument on such a foundation, one can use core arguments of the deterrence theory—that decision makers of a given nation will rationally calculate the military balance with its adversary and will decide either to attack if the balance is favorable or not attack if it is unfavorable.[57]

From such a point of view decision makers are addressed in deterrence theory as *value maximizers* who may choose war only if its benefits exceed costs. They are also expected to make calculations on the probability of success and the likely response of their adversary if they initiate a war. Accordingly, if the probability of success is remote, because of the threat of retaliation by the adversary, the would-be initiator refrains from launching an attack.

Deterrence theorists, especially those who subscribe to the deterrence by denial approach, thus pay a great amount of consideration to the balance of military forces between the attacker and the defender in the correct deterrence force equation. For without sufficient capability, a potential aggressor would not contemplate an attack. It is generally assumed that a state will not initiate a war that it expects to lose, so that the defender's possession of superior military capability and the adversary's recognition of the superiority are sufficient conditions for successful deterrence.[58]

Deterrence by punishment also gives prominence to the capability factor in the war calculations of likely initiators. According to this approach, if the potential initiator believes that the defender has the capability and the willingness to retaliate, it is deterred

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[56] See Paul Huth and Bruce Russett, "What Makes Deterrence Work? Cases from 1900 to 1980," *World Politics*, 36 (July 1984), 496–526, for an examination and critique of these hypotheses; and Robert Jervis, "Deterrence Theory Revisited," *World Politics*, 31 (January 1979), 289–324 on the three waves of deterrence theorists.

[57] This is implied in the writings of early deterrence theorists such as Herman Kahn, *On Thermonuclear War* (Princeton, NJ.: Princeton University Press, 1961); Glenn H. Snyder, "Deterrence and Power," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 4 (June 1960), 163–178. It is assumed that a challenger will not go to war if it is confronted by an opponent that is militarily it equal or superior.

[58] Jack S. Levy, "Review Article: When Do Deterrent Threats Work?" *British Journal of Political Science*, 18 (October 1988), 485–512.

by the conviction that the threatened punishment exceeds the benefits of the attack. However, if the initiator believes either that the defender is incapable or that its threat is incredible, it will attack.[59]

D.   PERCEPTION

There are many ways to approach the issue of deterrence. The one discussed here focuses on understanding the *reasoning* of the potential aggressor (who may not think of himself as an aggressor). This approach is concerned with human perceptions, arguments, and logic—all of them affected by psychological considerations.

In attempting to describe reasoning analytically, one could structure the problem in several ways. The approach described here assumes *limited rationality*. "Limited rationality" means that the relevant leaders attempt to relate means to ends (i.e., their decisions and actions have purpose); consider a range of options; and evaluate those options in terms of likely outcome, most favorable outcome, and worst-case outcome. Thus, the leaders *attempt* to be rational and even take uncertainty into account.

The following assessment views deterrence credibility from the standpoint of the psychological interactions that are needed to make deterrence work. If Actor "A" is to successfully deter Actor "B," certain conditions must be satisfied. Actor "A" must understand how Actor "B" thinks and behaves so that "A" can determine how to motivate "B" not to act. Actor "B" must actually think and behave in a manner consistent with that understood by Actor "A". There must be no possibility for misunderstanding between Actors "A" and "B," so that "B" knows exactly what acts will provoke retaliation; believes in certain retaliation; and realizes the consequences would be clearly unacceptable compared to potential rewards from the "forbidden" act.

These three circumstances involve human communications, human assessments, and projected human behavior—none of which can be expected to be perfect. At best, deterrence is an imperfect undertaking, and is not without risks. The initiator must calculate whether it has the required military capability to win a war with the defender

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[59] Christopher H. Achen and Duncan Snidal, "Rational Deterrence: Theory and Comparative Case Studies," *World Politics*, 41 (January 1989), 143–169.

and estimate the cost of such an action. This calculation affects the attacker's raw utility of fighting the defender, and also its estimate of the probability that the defender will retaliate.[60] Any uncertainty or ambiguity makes those risks impossible to calculate.

There are several obstacles to overcome to meet the abovementioned conditions for successful deterrence. The first is to resist the temptation to believe that others think and behave as we do. Sometimes they do not. Thus, one has to accomplish an objective and extensive study of another's conduct and then predict the other actor's behavior without reference to one's own experience and biases. This is a psychologically unattainable task—it is not possible to predict one's own behavior under all conditions with confidence, let alone that of someone else.

A second obstacle to overcome is in thinking critical military decisions are made by one person in isolation. Critical military decisions usually evolve through some process of shared thinking and assessment. Thus, the behavior of a decision-making group must be predicted, including the psychological interchange between members of that group. If one person's conduct cannot be accurately predicted, how can a group's conduct be reasonable assessed? Yet, assurance of successful deterrence requires a reasonably accurate prediction.

A third obstacle is in understanding the probability that the deterred party will not always be wise, rational, and prudent in its decision making. Such an expectation can lead to the belief that deterrence will not fail, yet that could be deceptive and dangerous in a situation of rapidly rising tensions. That expectation could produce miscalculations resulting in tragedy. It should be expected that decision making on the brink of war would be in a high anxiety, emotionally-charged situation not conducive to cool-headed, balanced thinking.

A fourth (and not necessarily final) obstacle is accepting the reality that the best deterrence will be less than perfect. For example, one never knows how other actors would balance cost with rewards or would calculate risks. Even worse, the degree of such

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[60] Huth and Russett, "What Makes Deterrence Work? Cases from 1900 to 1980," 501.

doubt is beyond accurate assessment. Therefore, an actor, who chooses to depend on deterrence, should understand that deterrence psychology is not compatible with assured protection.

The main argument is based on the abovementioned notion that since deterrence is about influencing the perceptions—and ultimately, the actions of another party— deterrence is really the ultimate mind game. Simply put, deterrence is about influencing *perceptions*. Using this idea one can argue that there are two main elements to all forms of stimulus which apply to deterrence. These are the perception of capability to deliver violence and the perception of will, based on the reputation of the ability to implement intentions effectively. In the light of that, to build the argument one can use the term *misperception* as the inaccurate inferences, miscalculations of consequences, and misjudgments about how others will react to one's policies.

At this point in discussion it is necessary to explore another argument and explain war initiation by a weaker state. Weaker powers may also engage in war without expecting a major military victory in order to avoid the losses that are foreseen unless they do so. Here is an example to make point clear: in ancient times fighting itself was valued as an ultimate goal or as a mean for improving man and society. Second, when faced with the choice of giving up territory to a stronger rival or losing it through a war, the state might choose war because of considerations of honor, domestic politics, or international reputation.[61] This may be considered contrary to the expectations of deterrence theory; this will be addressed in the conclusion.

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[61] For a similar argument, see Philip Tetlock, "Testing Deterrence Theory: Some Conceptual and Methodological Issues," *Journal of Social Issues* 43, No. 4 (1987), 85–91.

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IV.   GAME THEORY APPROACH

This chapter uses Game Theory to test the idea that decision makers' perceptions of achieving limited objectives in a short war may have motivated the initiation of the August War of 2008 by a weaker adversary. This will use a two-dimensional model to mathematically capture the actor's perceptions, actor's behavior patterns, and the actor's strategy solutions in a crisis situation.

A.   INITIAL CONDITIONS

Most models of decision making are based on three fundamental assumptions. First, all possible states of the world facing a decision maker can be ranked in regard to desirability. Second, the decision maker knows the connection between the strategies he or she may choose from and the desired goals or evaluated states of the world. Third, the decision maker optimizes. That is, he/she chooses the strategy that brings about the greatest satisfaction, which is the best state of the world discounted by the cost of the strategies used to bring it about).

This model will include players, options, strategies, outcomes, and preference functions or preference vectors to consider Georgia's engagement strategy vis-à-vis Russia's engagement strategy. The two-dimensional model will use the term "Move" broadly to include the use of force originated from the four elements of national power: military, economic, political, and social as a means for a state to achieve policy and not as an end in itself.

Each player's possible strategies are a represented along one side of the matrix: one player controls the rows, the other the columns. The figures shown in the cells will represent preference rankings from 4 (best) down to 1 (worst). The aim is to help one understand the decisions faced by the actors, the interactions among their choices, and the tactics (threats, promises, bargaining, communication) they may employ to further their aims. Recognizing that there may be good reasons for the players to arrive at various outcomes, analysis can explicate which results are supported by which lines of reasoning.

The parts of the model are defined as follows:

- *Players:* the interested participants in a conflict.

- *Options:* the possible courses of action available to the players.

- *Strategies:* any set of options that can be taken by a particular player.

    - Set of *sequential options* that can be taken by a particular player will be called a *retribution strategy*

- *Outcomes:* after each player chooses a strategy, the result is an outcome, as feasible combinations of options and strategies.

- *Preference Vectors*: a totally ordered set specifying how good or bad each outcome is for each player. Game Theory is often thought to require quantification of preferences by means of utility scales. However, this model assumes only that one can define a preference order for each player. In other words, outcomes are simply ranked from best to worst.

The analysis is based on the assumption that every player knows what the game is and has complete information about everyone's available strategies and preferences, but does not know what strategy has been chosen by the other player. When the participants are not fully informed about the situation, all the information about the game is perceived by each player in an individual manner. Strategies and preference vectors will be referred to as *a player's viewpoint*. Each player constructs his perceptual game according to what he imagines the other players' viewpoints are. This imagination can be thought of as a player's belief. In Game Theory for example, a player's strategy choice may depend on what he believes to be opponents' viewpoint about the game. This belief about opponent's viewpoint will be called *player's perception*.

Complete information is generally required in classical Game Theory, so that all the players fully understand the conflict and thereby possess the same amount of information to correctly know each other's strategies and preferences. The requirement for complete information is a great shortcoming in game theory and makes the practical application of game theory to real world conflicts very restrictive. Quite often in actual disputes, differences in perception among the participants drastically affect the decision-making process and sometimes lead to unexpected results.

This research uses the term *misperception* broadly, to include inaccurate inferences, miscalculations of consequences, and misjudgments about how others will react to one's policies. Although war can occur even when both sides see each other accurately, misperception often plays a large role. Particularly interesting are evaluations of another state's intentions. Accordingly, misperceptions can be of great importance when studying the behavior of players in conflict. Under misperception, players may take strategies that will not turn out to be optimal. Furthermore, the resulting outcomes may not be stable in the game after the misperceptions have been exposed.

Evaluation of the research question will begin by assuming that states start wars intending to win. When initiators win, the assumption is that states have correctly calculated and made a rational choice. A loss indicates a miscalculation and/or misperception of some sort. Together, this set of assumptions and arguments is the key assumption.

A justification for this assumption starts with Clausewitz's definition of war as a strategic interaction rooted in hostile intent and chosen for political/policy goals, which can be met by compelling the enemy through force. The goals of war are to increase a state's power, security, and/or wealth, and these goals are things that can be won or extracted by a successful plan to force somebody to do something. States that use war to pursue these goals behave according to what we term *Clausewitzian rationality*. This requires assumptions be made about state preferences and the process of pursuing those preferences. For preferences, there is the assumption that states are using war to pursue goals of power, security, and wealth. There is also the assumption that rational decision making process exists if a state achieves its goals. In a rational process, there is, at most, a modest amount of miscalculation and misperception. Initiators make reasonably robust calculations, and they choose war when it is likely to pay. Under these conditions, initiators will win their wars most of the time.

It has been argued that, by definition, every war involves at least one serious misperception. But if an actor has a dominant strategy, then misperception is irrelevant.

Thus, misperception only matters when the decision of an actor is contingent on the actions of another actor.[62] Abovementioned examples are not the case here, as the model will examine the actors with no dominant strategy.

The decision making process is viewed in much the same way as rational choice practitioners. States gather information, access and rank their options by calculating the relative utility of these options, and then pick the best option to maximize utility. However, one then assumes preferences for initiators. The assumption that initiators want to win does not lack deductive, scholarly, and common sense support, but it is an assumption. It is a useful assumption because with it, one can judge the overall quality of the decision making process.

The model does not include other factors that could influence a Russian decision to invade including, but not limited to U.S., Georgian, and Russian domestic political considerations; ethnic conflicts and separatist spillover (Abkhazia, South Ossetia); and/or resource competition (oil, gas, pipelines, air corridors).

B. THE GAME

Game Theory is a branch of applied mathematics that is used in the social sciences in which there are two or more parties who can affect what happens, all of whom are pursuing their separate aims. Such situations provide particular challenges for decision makers. Because no actor has a complete control over events, each needs to take account of the others' possible actions. Suppose actor A's most advantageous course of action depends on what actor B decides to do, and vice versa. If both realize that this is so, A will try both to anticipate and to influence B's choices, knowing that B is trying to do the same in reverse. Thus, even if A and B never meet, their decisions interact, and they will find themselves in an outcome depending on both of their choices. Such situations typically bring forth possibilities for mutual threats, deceit, bluff, and counter-bluff. Figure 5 illustrates, with the use of letters, how each option will combine to produce a result.

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[62] For a similar argument, see Arthur A. Stein, "When Misperception Matters," *World Politics*, 34 (July 1982), 505–526.

		Russia	
		Move	Not move
Georgia	Move	A, Z → B, W	D, Y / C, X
	Not move		
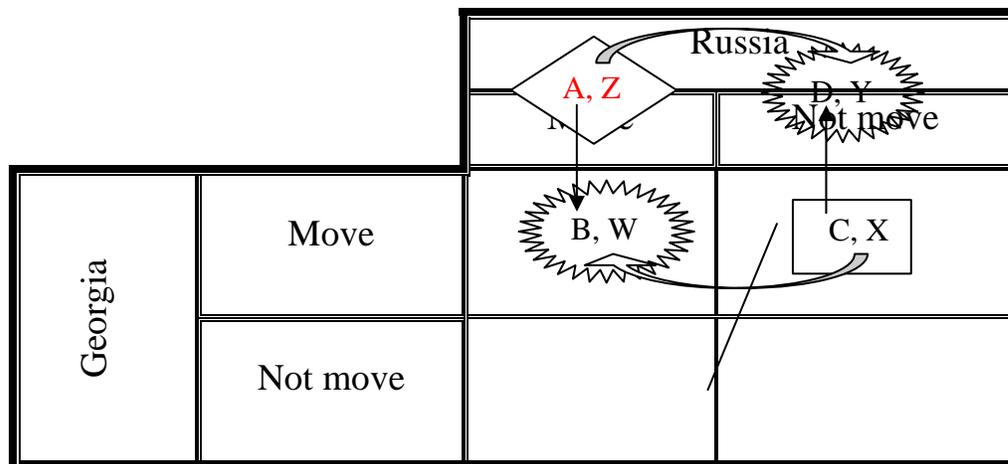
Status quo of the "frozen conflict"*

Figure 5.   Outcome Matrix

There are four possible results:

- AZ—Georgia makes move, Russia makes move
- DY—Georgia makes move, Russia doesn't make move
- BW—Georgia doesn't make move, Russia makes move
- CX—Georgia doesn't make move, Russia doesn't make move*

Due to the economic, military, and political cost (lack of the resources after the fall of the USSR).

1.   Rankings

Utilities for rankings are based on the author's opinion and experience only. The assumption is that Georgia and Russia make foreign policy decisions based on the unitary, rational actor model (RAM). Both players are trying to maximize their score or individual strategies. For the purposes of this game the author has established a rank order for Georgian and Russian strategic options in Tables 1 and 2.

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individual strategies. For the purposes of this game, the author has established a rank order for Georgian and Russian strategic options in Tables 1 and 2:

4—BEST	*Georgia makes move,* *Russia doesn't make move*
3—Next BEST	*Georgia doesn't make move,* *Russia doesn't make move*
2—Least BEST	*Georgia doesn't make move,* *Russia makes move*
1—WORST*	*Georgia makes move,* *Russia makes move*

Table 1.　　Strategic Options for Georgia

	Georgia's perception	**Russia's preferences**
4—BEST	*Russia makes move,* *Georgia doesn't make move*	*Russia makes move,* *Georgia doesn't make move*
3—Next BEST	*Russia doesn't make move,* *Georgia doesn't make move*	*Russia doesn't make move,* *Georgia doesn't make move*
2—Least BEST	*Russia doesn't make move,* *Georgia makes move*	*Russia makes move,* *Georgia makes move*
1—WORST	*Russia makes move,* *Georgia makes move***	*Russia doesn't make move,* *Georgia makes move****

Table 2.　　Strategic Options for Russia

* Worst outcome for Georgia in the light of less costly capitulation versus total war (battle of France, World War II).

** Worst outcome for Russia in the light of invading an internationally recognized state boundaries in attempt to change the borders that emerged from the breakup of the Soviet Union by force.

*** *Worst outcome for Russia in the light of losing face in an international arena as a "world power" after failing as a peacekeeper to preserve ceasefire.*

Based on the rankings in Tables 1 and 2, one can establish the game and illustrate two Nash Equilibriums from Georgia's point of view in Figure 6 and mistakes in Georgia's calculation regarding equilibrium in Figure 7.

Figure 6.   Payoff Matrix, Georgia's Point of View

***Notice that ordinal preferences are used to construct a preference vector. Although cardinal utility values could also be used, the explanation here is presented for the case of ordinal preferences.*

		Russia	
		Move	**Not move**
Georgia	**Move**	1,2	4,1
	Not Move	2,4	3,3

Strategy "MOVE" for Georgia/Strategy "NOT MOVE" for Russia leads to the "4, 1" outcome in a sequential game. No more stable as equilibrium.
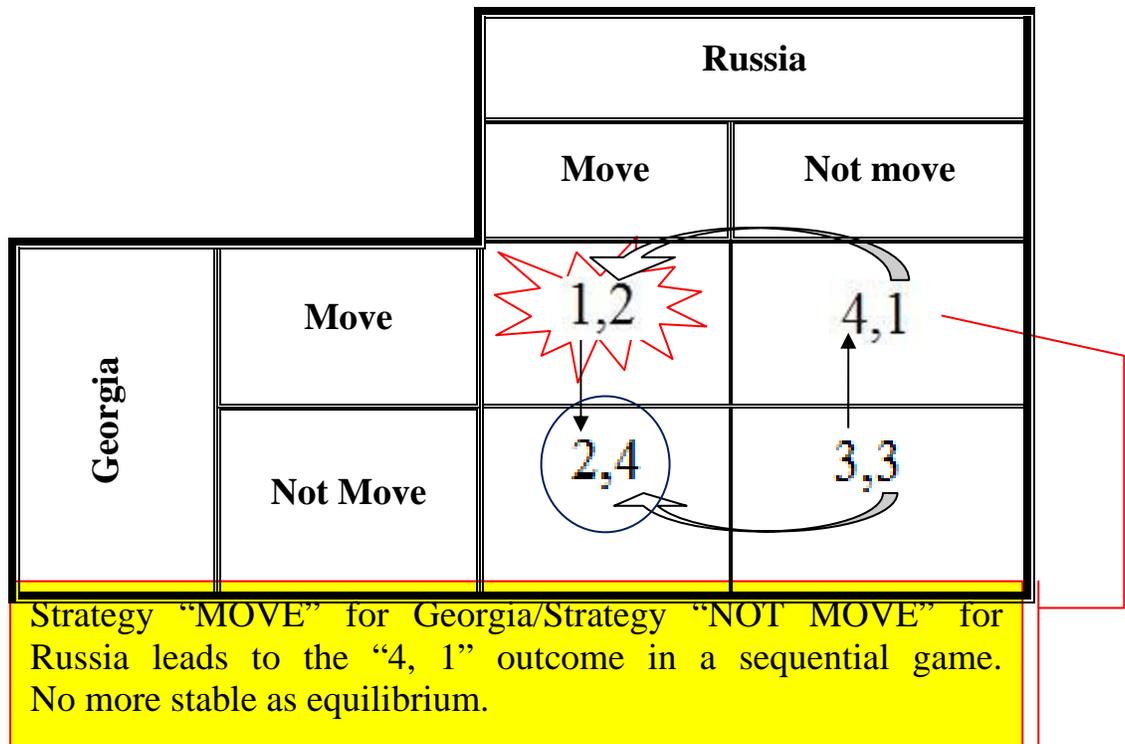
Figure 7.   Payoff Matrix, Russia's Point of View

The above figures illustrate the Georgian and Russian policy dilemma with respect to South Ossetia. From Georgia's perspective, neither side has a dominant strategy. On the other hand, Russia as a peacekeeper is *irrevocably committed* to retribution strategy "MOVE."

According to Tbilisi's point of view, if either side seeks to win by choosing its optimal utility score of "4" (Strategy "MOVE" for Georgia and Strategy "MOVE" for Russia) the outcome will be the worst for both players at payoff (1, 1). This model of bilateral coercion or bilateral bargaining under threat of violence is very much similar to the "Game of Chicken."

The "Game of Chicken" is played between two rivals driving two cars towards each other on one road. The rivals speed toward each other in their cars. The first rival who veers the car in order to prevent a collision "loses face" and is "chicken." The rival who did not veer is considered the courageous winner. If both rivals veer, there is no

damage, but both sides lose face. If neither side veers, the worst possible outcome—both sides destroyed—occurs. So here we have initial conditions: one party willingly creates conflict by challenging the other and threatens to destroy a common interest if it does not get its way in the conflict; the defending party may reciprocate with the same threat. Typically, the common interest in chicken is something that is manipulated as a means of coercion, not something that is mutually sought. The spirit of the game is in the contest in which each party is trying to prevail over the other, and perceptions of the other party's intensions are crucial. The actors face a problem of establishing the credibility of their stated intensions by creating fear. Additionally, a rational player always chooses to cooperate (surrender) when facing an opponent who is not expected to cooperate; he cannot "protect himself" by not cooperating, as mutual noncooperation is the worst possible outcome!

Analyzing the game from the Georgian position reveals two (Nash) equilibriums: "4, 2" and "2, 4." That is, a "win" for either side can be stable, because the loser can only move to an even worse outcome. However, the game is symmetric between the two players, so there is no way of telling which side will establish a winning position. In practice, the model tells us to expect a race to establish commitment, each side trying to convince the other that it cannot or will not back down. If both the Georgia and Russia choose a lower risk utility (Strategy "NOT MOVE" for Georgia /Strategy "NOT MOVE" for Russia), each is mildly disgraced for "chickening out," but they do survive, which is the next-best outcome at (3, 3). If either side departs from these two choices, one side will badly lose face, which is its next worse payoff "2," whereas the other player is perceived as the winner, and receives his best outcome at payoff "4". Therefore, any attempt to alter the situation by negotiation is potentially unstable if the other side decides to maximize at the others expense. Thus, the players are left trapped in a zero-sum game whereby one side's gain is the other side's loss. One should therefore consider what strategic moves are possible in order to resolve this policy dilemma and facilitate a positive outcome. Once it is known what's at stake and the risks involved, players should have enough awareness to make the choice that serves them best.

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As one can see, a basic feature of a "Game of Chicken" (when some form of communication or signaling among the players is possible) involves the first-mover advantage, that is, the incentive: each player has to be the first to bind irrevocably to noncooperation bound to win if the other player is rational. Generally, moves in a "Game of Chicken" are either sequential or simultaneous. This model uses the sequential game; such a model is close to the real live scenario, as actors will make alternating moves. In this situation each player is advised to use a game tree to plot what they think the other players' future moves will be and use that knowledge to calculate their own best current move. But, given that Russia as a peacekeeper is *irrevocably committed* to retribution strategy "MOVE," Georgia will lose the first-mover advantage if their chosen strategy is "MOVE." The outcome "4, 2" (Strategy "MOVE" for Georgia /Strategy "NOT MOVE" for Russia) becomes "4, 1" in a sequential game and is no more stable as equilibrium.

Usually, in the "Game of Chicken" no uncertainty exists about the parties basic intentions—each is trying to prevail over the other. However, misperception of each other's intentions of determination can occur with a mistaken prediction of the behavior of another actor.

One other feature to consider is that neither actor has a dominant strategy in this game. If one actor expects the adversary to play strategy "NOT MOVE," their best policy is to play strategy "MOVE," taking advantage of the other's cooperativeness. If the actor expects the other to play "MOVE," then they should play strategy "Not MOVE" to avoid maximum loss. As one can see, rationality in this game is vague; what is rational depends on a player's expectations about the other's behavior, not primarily on the game's payoff structure.
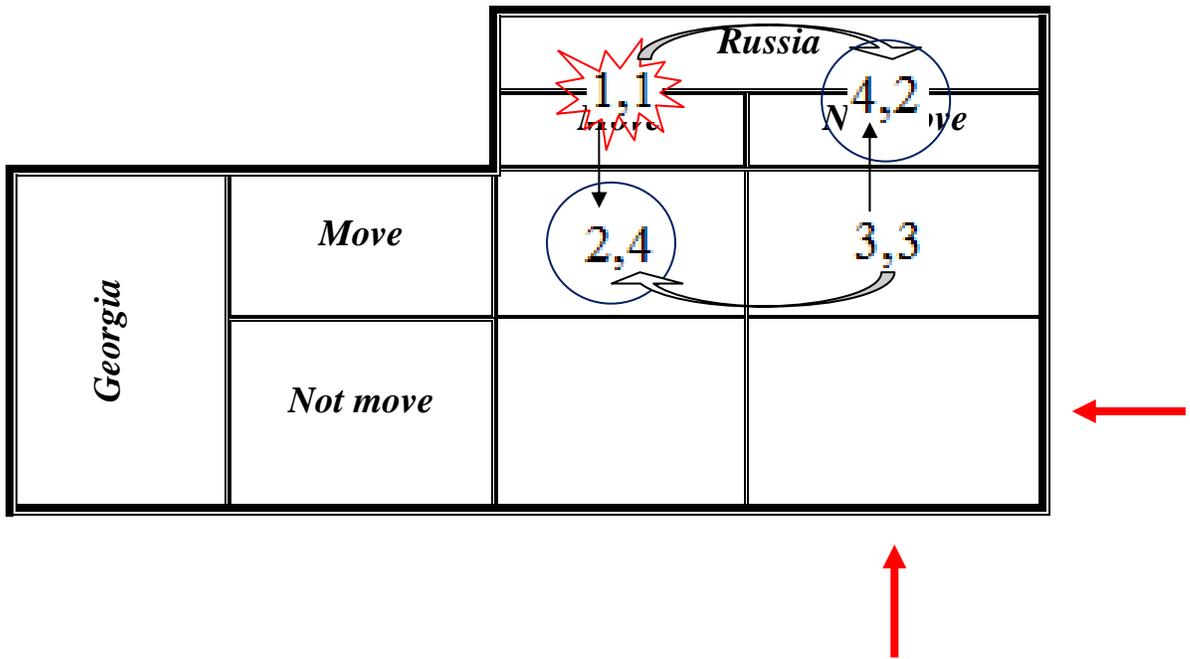
Figure 8.   Likely Outcome without Communication

The payoff matrix in Figure 8 suggests that from Georgia's point of view game need not result either in victory for one actor or in mutual disaster. Another outcome is possible, that of mutual compromise (i.e., outcome 3, 3). This assessment is that such an outcome is a "likely outcome without communication" (if the game is played one time) as the both actors strategy is unequivocally rational for minimizing the maximum possible loss (Maxi-Min strategy).

It is more in keeping with the spirit of the game to say that compromise occurs when both sides expect the other to be "tough"—to play strategy "MOVE" with a probability too high to be risked. In the street race (swerve or straight), both cars can swerve. But in a real life scenario compromise results from a process of a bargaining. One side concedes something out of the fear that if it does not yield, the other will initiate a conflict. The other side then makes a reciprocal concession, because it believes the first party will fight rather than yield further. As one can see, this is the way to a compromise, because of the mutual perceptions of each others' "toughness."

Introducing the idea of probabilities in the "Game of Chicken." can help prove the point on misperception. Probabilities in this game can be evaluated as follows:

- Each actor's estimation of the probability that the other actor will play strategy "MOVE" **(the credibility of the opponent's threat)**

- The degree of risk of the opponent's choosing strategy "MOVE" which each party can stand without being "frightened" to give way (**"critical risk level"**).

But if one player has a misperception of the opponent's credibility regarding his own critical risk level, one will witness one of the two outcomes: over-perception may induce unnecessary capitulation; under-perception could produce disaster. The key factor here is that whether a commitment—any message—is perceived as intended (or perceived at all) depends not only on its clarity and plausibility, but also on how it fits with the recipient's predispositions. Predispositions include the commitment of one player to some retribution along the way. If such notion is present, the other player might find itself deterred from what otherwise would be its optimal first move.

To make this idea more understandable, consider the street race (swerve or straight) scenario. Driver A will drive straight, because his evaluation of his opponent's strategy to drive "straight" is "good" (the degree of credibility of the opponent's threat). Correspondently the same Driver A will decide to "swerve," if his evaluation of his opponent's strategy to drive "straight" is "too high" (over "critical risk" level). As one can see the calculation behind the judgments "pretty good" or "too high" involves the relationship between an actors' critical risk and his evaluation of the opponent's credibility. If the latter is the higher of the two probabilities, an actor must back down (play strategy "NOT MOVE"). If the opponent's threat credibility is below the level of the actor's critical risk, the actor can rationally stand firm on his strategy "MOVE."

As mentioned at the beginning of the paper, Russia was represented as a peacekeeping force in the South Ossetia. The rules of engagement from Russia's point of view were as follows:

1. Unless provoked, the player will always cooperate (to "promote" peace)

$$p_{(1-q)} = 0.5$$

2. If provoked, the player will retaliate (to "enforce" peace),

$$p_{(q)} > 1-p_{(q)}$$

Effective deterrence depends on the capability and the determination to carry out retaliatory threats that have been clearly communicated to an opponent. As one can see, Russia becomes irrevocably committed to retribution strategy as a peacekeeping force "MOVE." From this moment on it is a different game: **Russia's critical risk = .50** (Georgia's strategy as rational player (no obligations) q = 1-q or .5 each) *vs*. **Georgia's critical risk > .50** (Russia's retribution strategy (peacekeeping force) $p_{(q)} > 1- p_{(q)}$). Figure 9 may clarify these relationships:
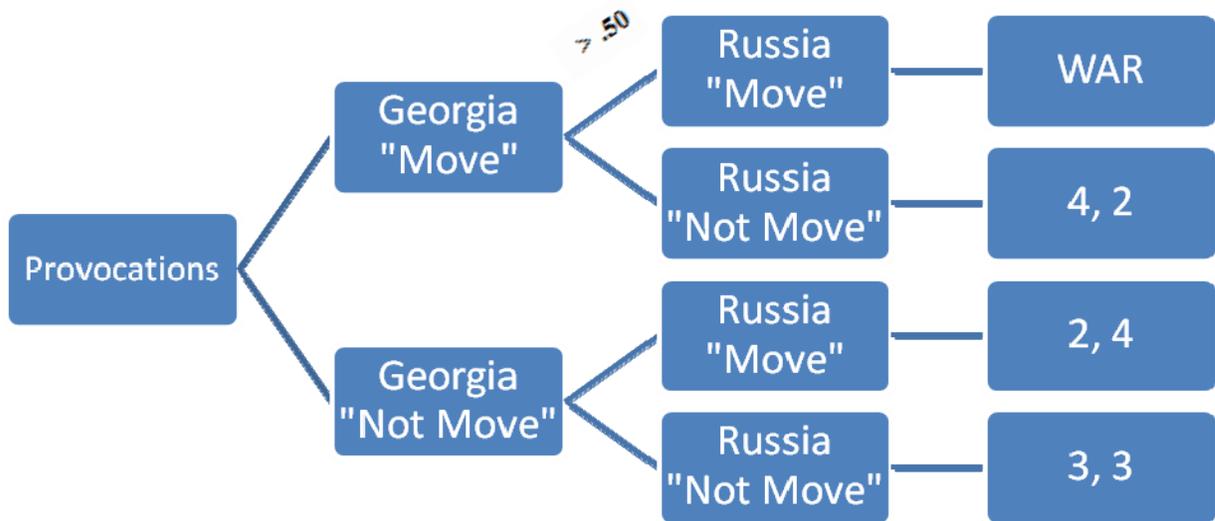

Figure 9.   Decision Tree

Simple calculation: Given that Probability of (Russia's *retribution* strategy "MOVE" | Georgia's strategy "MOVE") > **Probability of** (Russia's strategy "Not MOVE" | Georgia's strategy "MOVE")**, the most likely outcome is WAR (1, 1).**

The critical risk level for either side is determined by a comparison of the payoff from acting to the payoff for standing firm. Georgia, for example, loses ("2") by complying with the demand. If it stands firm, Tbilisi can gain ("4") or lose (as bad as "1")—all depending on Russia's choice. If both perceive that their critical risk is lower than the opponent's threat credibility, the stage is set for mutual compromise. But if the both sides maintain control, war can occur only if either or both sides become irrevocably committed to acting on their misperception. In other words, so long as either state retains its freedom of action, war can be avoided, because that state can back down at the last minute. But commitment can inhibit this flexibility, and that, of course is its purpose. As illustrated, if one side persuades the other that it is committed to attack, the other side will have no choice but to withdraw.

V. CONCLUSION

On August 12, 2008, Russian President Dmitriy Medvedev declared, "the aim of Russia's operation for coercing the Georgian side to peace had been achieved.... The aggressor has been punished."[63]

To put the math to the story, one needs to recall the chain of events during the crisis. According to the report of the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Conflict in Georgia:

> The shelling of Tskhinvali by the Georgian armed forces during the night of 7 to 8 August 2008 marked the beginning of the large-scale armed conflict in Georgia, yet it was only the culminating point of a long period of increasing tensions, provocations, and incidents. Indeed, the conflict has deep roots in the history of the region, in peoples' national traditions and aspirations as well as in age-old perceptions or rather misperceptions of each other, which were never mended and sometimes exploited.[64]

An important point is that the use of force by both sides, but in particular Russia's military operations, demonstrates that the military actions of last August were neither random nor independent acts that incidentally happened, but rather extensions of the political interplay that preceded this war. This perspective was born out of Russian preparations taken prior to August 7, such as the Russia's July *Kavkaz-2008* military exercise ("Кавказ-2008"). Furthermore, military means were used by Russia as part of its political interaction with Georgia going back at least as far as 2007. Part of Russia's motivation can be reflected in the newest development in the region. Reuter's news agency reported on January 26, 2009 that the Russian Navy plans to build a base in Abkhazia, which borders the Black Sea.[65] Russia has been long searching for another

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[63] Jim Nichol, "Russia-Georgia Conflict in South Ossetia: Context and Implications for U.S. Interests," CRS RL34618.

[64] "Report of the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Conflict in Georgia," IIFFMCG (September 2009), Vol. 1, 11.

[65] Christian Lowe, "Russia Plans Base in Georgia Rebel Region: Report," Jan 26, 2009 http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSLQ36012320090126.

naval base location in the event that it loses the rights to base naval ships at its main Black Sea base in Sevastopol, Ukraine.[66] The lease on that base expires in 2017.

Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Matthew Bryza stated:

…The possible deployment of a naval base in Abkhazia, an air base in Abkhazia and a military base in South Ossetia seems to be moving in the wrong direction. Russia pledged to reduce its troops to the levels and locations of before the Russia-Georgia war.[67]

Regarding Georgia's decision to go to war, it is unclear where the primacy of politics is measured on the decision-making scale relative to the other factors of pride, prestige, and passion. Initially, Georgia's political aims were declared as limited to protecting Georgian citizens in South Ossetia. The military contingent initially deployed into Tskhinvali was also restricted. However, as much as the limitation of military size was a result the short notice of the decision to utilize military force, the inadequate availability of military units due to the Iraq deployment and the disposition of forces for Abkhazia contingencies, it was also linked to finding the right balance between political ends and military means. Hence, the Georgian decision on August 7 to utilize military force was complex from a military strategy perspective. This view was later born out in the Georgian parliamentary inquiry into the conflict.

Concerning Russia, the picture is much clearer. Though pride, prestige, and passion had roles to play in Moscow's decision to go to war, Russia's actions were more along the lines of Clausewitz's famous dictum regarding politics and war. It is obvious that Moscow's military objective was not to restore the status quo ante bellum in South Ossetia, but rather more expansive or "high-ended" in that the military objective was "to render [the enemy] politically helpless [or] militarily impotent."[68]

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[66] Reshad Aziz, "Russia against … NATO and geopolitical reality," (Russian), *The First News Agency*, May 2, 2007, http://1news.az/analytics/20070502093858396.html.

[67] Merle David Kellerhals "U.S. Opposes Russian Military Bases in Abkhazia, South Ossetia," 06 February 6, 2009, U.S. Department of State's Bureau of International Information Programs.

[68] Carl von Clausewitz, *On War,* in Heuser B., Howard, M. and Paret, P. (eds. and trans.) (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), 7.

In any case, Georgia's decision to move ahead with an in intra-state war against South Ossetia was based on inaccurate inferences, miscalculations of consequences, and misjudgments about how others (Russia particularly) would react to their action. "The main fundamental question is why Saakashvili and his administration . . . did not think Russia would respond with all in its power, guns and tanks"—asked David Usupashvili, leader of the opposition Republican Party, calling for investigations into what he called failures in diplomacy and warfare.[69]

According to Georgian National Security Council Secretary, Alexander Lomaia a *proxy confrontation* with Russian forces, similar to the first South Ossetian conflict in 1991–92, was considered the worst choice. Nobody suspected or anticipated any problems (planning optimism). Georgians believed that after the fiasco of Russia's two wars in Chechnya, Moscow would not further risk its international reputation by invading a sovereign country.[70] Tbilisi expected that the Russians would fight with and through the hands of the separatists.

Thus, the realization that Georgian forces were not up against South Ossetia's militia, but an opponent who could greatly outnumber the Georgian army came as a shock. That seems very strange, considering that Tbilisi had earlier flagged military exercises in both Abkhazia and on the Russian border with South Ossetia as indicators of Russian aggressive intentions. The reconstruction of a railway running from Russia into Abkhazia, the shooting down of Georgian reconnaissance planes over Abkhazia, and the build-up of Russian peacekeeper troops in both regions were viewed as additional sources of concern. During the buildup of tension, U.S. officials urged Georgian officials both publicly and privately, on many occasions, to resist the temptation of any military reaction, even in the face of repeated the provocations they were clearly facing U.S. representative were surprised when their advice went unheeded.[71]

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[69] Tara Bahrampour, "Georgians Question Wisdom of War With Russia" September 9, 2008, from http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/09/08/AR2008090802449.html.

[70] "Georgia: Flaws Found in Tbilisi's War Planning and Operation," 2008.

[71] Helene Cooper and Thom Shanker, "After Mixed U.S. Messages, a War Erupted in Georgia." *The New-York Times*, (August 12, 2008).

At first glance, the conflict represents a case of a security dilemma escalation. Georgian restrictions threatened South Ossetians and led to countermeasures by both Ossetians and Russia, their patron, to defend territorial and administrative control and local freedom of movement and, ultimately, to deter a potential Georgian military offensive. Georgians viewed these countermeasures as threatening to local Georgian populations and to their control of territory within the breakaway region. They thus felt compelled to take defensive and deterrent measures, which, in turn, threatened Ossetians even more. This spiral led the parties to the brink of unwanted war. But in reality even if an EU investigating team blamed Georgia for starting the war in August of 2008, the report accused Moscow of escalating tensions ahead of the conflict.[72]

The point here is that one should not conclude from this example that misperception is always dominant in war. But it is not surprising that misperceptions have often added to the problems of war.

Taking all of the abovementioned ideas into account, if the uncertainty about others' intentions cannot be eliminated, states should design policies that will not fail disastrously, even if they are based on incorrect assumptions. States should try to construct a policy of deterrence, which will not set off the spiral of hostility if existing political differences are in fact bridgeable. The policy should also be designed to conciliate without running the risk that the other side, if aggressive, will be emboldened to attack. Such a policy requires the state to combine firmness, threats, and an apparent willingness to fight with reassurances, promises, and a credible willingness to consider the other side's interests.

On August 6, 2008 the Georgian ruling elite should have remembered their history and, as an alternative of to allowing South Ossetia to become the twenty-first century Sudetenland,[73] let diplomacy talk instead of the cannons, at least until the

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[72] Report of the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Conflict in Georgia," IIFFMCG (September 2009), Vol. 1, 23.

[73] Author refers to a Sudeten crisis of 1938, which led to Nazi Germany's invasion of Czechoslovakia.

Georgian military machine was ready to pick up the fight.[74] They also should have waited until the separatist regions were convinced that Georgia was not only *willing*, but also *capable* of inflicting unacceptable harm on them by all means (not only military, but economically, politically, etc.) necessary.

Some analysts suggest that the entire ordeal in August 2008 could have been parried through clear and immediate communication, by the principle of the Red Phone connecting the U.S. and Soviet heads of state, which was conceived and built following the Cuban Missile Crisis. Such a "confidence building measure" and communications system was designed to decrease tensions and prevent accidental nuclear war by providing direct contact. But the trend of Russia's policy toward dialog with the Georgian President can be reflected in the graphic terms, used by Prime Minister of Russia, according to an account from the Élysée Palace. Vladimir Putin, during a talk about a cease-fire to end the August war with the French President Nicolas Sarkozy spoke about hanging Georgia's president: "I am going to hang Saakashvili by the balls," Mr. Putin declared. [75]

Again, little is known about how states in such circumstances would think about the problem, judge the adversary's behavior, try to reassure the adversary, and decide whether these reassurances had been believed. But however these analyses are carried out, they will constitute, not just describe, reality. The question of whether war is inevitable cannot be answered apart from the participants' beliefs about it. Politicians make errors as easily as any men, and signals from the other side can thus be missed simply because of the limits of human intellectual competence. Game Theory is based on mathematics, but its implications are intuitive. How you respond to a situation depends on how you rate various options. Thus a key difficulty in studying any conflict situation is determining the preferences of the decision makers involved in the dispute. Having said that, the main goal of this paper is to put forward the idea that misperception can

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[74] According to the Georgian officials, when the war broke out, they had only partially completed the rollout of a new American-made communications system; see Ivan Watson, "New Details Surface about Georgia-Russia War." *NPR.* (November 18, 2008).

[75] "Vladimir Putin 'Wanted to Hang Georgian President Saakashvili by the Balls,'" *The Times*, November 14, 2008. http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/europe/article5147422.ece.

cause change in state policy, but may result in a greater risk and worst outcome—War. Most obviously, the failure of a deterrent that was badly designed or implemented would not falsify the theory, although it would raise the question of why the state produced such a suboptimal policy. Deterrence has more chances to fail not because the opponent is irrational, but through misperception, misunderstanding, and miscommunication. Nevertheless, deterrence also can fail because leaders find themselves in situations where they have nothing left to lose. A state can rationally choose to fight a war it thinks it will probably lose if the gains of winning and/or the costs of alternative policies are great enough. On that note, in Georgia, it was obvious that any involvement of the Georgian military would initiate Russia's response. However, Georgia did manage *resolve* the prolonged frozen conflict—like an animal caught in trap, that would chew off its leg in an attempt to escape.

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